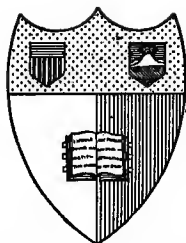


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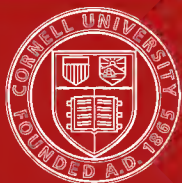
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TOLD BY THE AYAH

TOLD BY THE AYAH

BY

ADVENA HEARLE

CLIFTON

J. BAKER AND SON

LONDON

SIMPKIN, MARSHALL AND CO., LTD.

1912

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PREFACE

AYAH really told these stories. Some of them are probably very old indeed.

Even quite grown-up natives of India—bearded men and grey-haired women—enjoy listening to fairy-tales. When Ayah found out I liked it, too, she told these to me; and I have translated them for you, because I loved them so much.

A. H.

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TOLD BY THE AYAH

CHAPTER I

THE MUGGERMUCH AND THE JACKAL

“ARÉ, *Bachchi*,* how can I tell thee stories when I am so busy? Thou knowest the memsahiba goes to the lord sahib’s this evening, and I have all things to make ready.”

“Only a little one, Ayah; one little, little one—the story the *khansamah* † told when he gave the dinner-party to the other Mohammedans; you remember—there was pink rice to eat, and you heard the story as you sat in your room next door.”

“*Aré*, poor little *Bachchi*,* but it is dull for thee since thy sister went to *Beliat*.‡ Come, then, and I will tell thee the cook’s story,” and the kind old native squatted beside Saidée’s chair, and laid her skinny brown hand on the child’s lap.

It was indeed dull for Saidée since Margaret had

* *Bachchi*=little girl. † *Khansamah*=cook.

‡ *Beliat*=England.

gone home to school. Saidée was of an age when reading is tedious, and she found that frequent long words dropped out, or passed over, are apt to interfere with the plot of even the most fascinating tale. I fear that, like many Anglo-Indian children, her education was, if not neglected, at least backward for her years; and the long hot days when she had to stay indoors in her darkened nursery, with every door and window shut to keep out the pitiless heat of the Indian sun, were very tedious to the little maid.

Just now an attack of fever had made her more listless and disinclined to amuse herself than ever, and the little English wild-rose drooped pathetically in that unnatural and exotic climate.

Father was too busy to take much notice of her. He was wrapped in the abstracted atmosphere of one who has striven for, and achieved, place and power in an official society; and Saidée's mother was busy, too. She considered herself a very hard-worked and hard-working woman, although her energies were mostly directed to dinner-parties and dances. She owed it to her husband's official position, she said; and perhaps she did.

Saidée's mother devoted a certain time to her every day, just as she did to the cook's accounts and the *dhobi's** lists. It was her duty, and she was a conscientious little woman; but there was not much

* *Dhobi*=washerman.

THE MUGGERMUCH AND THE JACKAL 3

doubt that her regret would be tinged with relief when Saidée's turn came to join Margaret at school in England. Mrs. Vansittart liked girls after they were grown up. They were such nice companions then, she said. She never realized that a little child is one of the most beautiful companions, and so Saidée was very lonely indeed.

Old Ayah—Umma Ayah, Saidée called her—was her only real intimate; and the affection between these two, the one so old and brown, the other so young and white, was quaint and picturesque.

I am not going to tell Ayah's story with all the native turns and twists which seemed so natural to little Saidée Vansittart. It has become anglicized in passing through Saidée's brain and mine; but this is the story, all the same:

THE MUGGERMUCH AND THE JACKAL.

You must know, first of all, that a Muggermuch is a crocodile, and this particular one lived in the Ganges.

It was a very salubrious spot, from a Muggermuch's point of view. The river was broad and not too swift; and for the greater part of the year there was a wide, flat border of yellow sand on either side to bask on. A little way up the stream was a "burning-ghat," where dead Hindus were burnt and then sent floating down the sacred river—they did not always go very far.

Where the sand ended, the jungle began ; and therein lived tigers and leopards and hyænas and a whole menagerie of other animals ; but about these the Muggermuch did not trouble his brains greatly. For one thing, he had very few brains, and was obliged to reserve those for more serious matters ; and for another, he considered himself much more civilized than the other beasts, because he preferred his meat roasted.

Over all was the hot, hot Indian sun, varied once a year for a whole three months at a time by the refreshing deluges of the monsoon.

One day the Muggermuch was basking far up on the sand (and looking very like one of the fallen logs from the jungle close by) when a Jackal came up to him.

"Will you tell me," said the Jackal, "what you mean by lying on *my* sand ! What did you come up here for ?"

"I don't know," said the Muggermuch, sleepily. "It was hot in the water."

"*Hot* in the water !" repeated the Jackal, "well, you *are* a silly ! But are you aware that all the ground about here is my property ?" he went on (which was a naughty fib).

The Muggermuch blinked and smiled. It was very easy for him to smile—his mouth was so long.

"Now, come," said the Jackal, sitting down amicably beside the Muggermuch, but sufficiently

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far behind his smile to be out of harm's way, "I don't wish to be unneighbourly. I am quite willing to give you a share in the occupation of this land. We will be brothers. Do you agree?"

The Muggermuch assented, and the Jackal said one or two extremely polite and friendly things. Then he jumped up and remarked:

"Now, my dear brother Muggermuch, I want to get to the other side of the river. It will save my going all the way round by the ford if you will carry me across on your back. That would be a little brotherly attention on your part to begin with."

So the Muggermuch trailed himself down to the river, and ferried the Jackal over on his back.

But as he went, he was thinking very hard; and because his brain was not quite big enough to hold the whole of his idea, some of it leaked out on to the tip of his tongue, and the Jackal heard him murmur:

"How I should like to eat this little Jackal's liver! I'm sure it would be very nice!"

"Oho!" said the Jackal, as he sprang down to the ground, "you want my liver, do you? You're very welcome! I left it hanging on that tree over there. You can go and get it, if you like."

The Muggermuch dragged himself over to the tree, and hunted and hunted, but he could not find the Jackal's liver; so he went back again. The

Jackal was sitting on the sand, holding his sides with laughter.

"Yah!" he said (for he was a very vulgar person, and had never been taught manners by his mother), "whoever would leave their liver hanging on a tree! How could a fellow live without his liver?" and he whisked away into the forest.

"All the same," said the Muggermuch, "I am sure his liver would taste very nice, and I am getting rather tired of roast Hindu."

The Muggermuch went on thinking about the Jackal's liver, and after about a week he had succeeded in making a plan to get it.

Accordingly, he one day watched until the Jackal had left his house and gone off foraging for dinner; and then he crept in, tail-foremost, and lay just inside the door, with his great mouth wide open; so that when the Jackal returned he would just walk straight in.

The Muggermuch considered this a *very* good plan; but he had to think it out in bits, because, as I have said, there was so little room in his brain.

The Jackal, however, was very wily, and he felt quite sure that the Muggermuch would try to get his liver, although he went about without troubling himself for some days. He knew the Muggermuch was very slow.

After a time, he became cautious; and when one

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day he noticed suspicious marks about his house, he sat down and considered before he went inside.

"I expect my dear brother is there, somehow," he said; and then he began to call gently, mimicking a crocodile's voice.

The Muggermuch thought it was his wife, and answered; and then the little Jackal frisked about for joy at his escape and cried out:

"My dear brother, suppose you come out of that! I'm not going to walk into your jaws *this* time."

So the Muggermuch came out rather disconsolately; and when he really did meet his wife, and heard there was only roast Hindu for dinner again, he groaned and said:

"Oh dear! I am so very tired of roast Hindu!"

After this the Jackal decided that the shore of the Ganges was not a good place for his health, so he went away into another country.

The Muggermuch also left very shortly afterwards, for his wife suggested that perhaps the Hindus of another locality might have a different flavour.

When the Jackal was told that the Muggermuch had gone—for he was a great gossip, and always heard all the news—he returned, and took up his abode in the Muggermuch's house, which was more commodious than his own. I believe he lives there still.

CHAPTER II

THE TWO JELKORUNS

“THERE is time before I go to eat my bread, *Bachchi*. Do thou sit in this arm-chair, and I will fan thee and tell the tale which Mahudmi, the *khitmatgar*'s* wife, told me last week. A nice woman is Mahudmi, and *purdah nashin*.† Her people are most particular. I also,” said Umma Ayah, “when I go to stay in the village to which my husband belongs, go into *purdah*. His father will have it so; and my sisters-in-law are so kind, they do everything for me—brush my hair and all;” and she swelled with visible pride and satisfaction.

“Mahudmi lives in the room with the *chics*‡ in front of the veranda, doesn't she?” said Saidée. “I have seen her sitting inside, like a ghost in the shadow.”

“Mahudmi is not like a ghost, little one,” cackled the old soul. “She is pretty, like the moon. But I must not bring the evil eye. If one praises people,

* *Khitmatgar*=table-servant. † *Purdah nashin*=veiled.

‡ *Chics*=blinds of split bamboo.

evi befalls. Yes, she has made the veranda very nice indeed, and she has a pot with some lamb-mint growing in it. It keeps off sickness. But see, I sit here and I do not tell thee the story of the two Jelkoruns. Lean back, *Hamari Behti*,* and I will speak."

THE TWO JELKORUNS.

There was once a great Raja who had a dreadful temper. He was not a bad man in many ways, but he was impatient and very violent.

One day, as he sat with his wife in the garden, some birds flew overhead.

"I think they are wild geese," the Rani said.

"Nothing of the sort!" said the Raja Jelkorun.
"They are only wild duck."

Now, the Rani very unwisely persisted in saying: "I *think* they are geese," and Jelkorun lost his temper completely.

"I will send a *sepo*y† on a swift charger to ride after them with bow and arrows," he cried, "and if they are geese I will exile myself from the kingdom and leave the whole *raj*‡ in your hands, but if they are ducks I will exile you."

The Rani, who was really a very good woman, thought to herself: "How can I govern this large kingdom, and carry on justice, and command armies.

* *Hamari Behti* = my child. † *Sepoy* = soldier.

‡ *Raj* = government.

It is better that the Raja should remain. What happens to me does not matter."

So she found an opportunity to tell the sepoy that whatever kind of birds they were which had flown past, he must say they were ducks; and the man obeyed her, saying that they had gone too far for him to shoot them, but he had seen quite clearly what they were.

The Raja Jelkorun was already very sorry for what he had said, but he would not go against his vow; and so the beautiful Rani was taken away to a forest on the borders of his kingdom and left there, loaded with jewels and money, but quite alone.

But she was so good that God took care of her, and the wild beasts of the jungle not only did her no harm, but helped her in every way they could, so that all her wants were supplied. She built herself a clever little hut of grass, and after she had been there a few months, and a little son came to share her solitude, she was almost happy.

One day a Brahmin, journeying through the forest, saw the hut and the beautiful woman who sat near it with her baby in her lap.

The Rani rose when he came near, and called him to her.

"I wish you to name my boy," she said.

Now, in India the parents do not choose a child's name, the priests do it for them; so this one looked in his book of astrology, and discovered that the

child ought to have the name of Jelkorun given to him ; and he then and there named him Jelkorun, like his father, although, of course, the Brahmin knew nothing about that.

In payment for his services the Rani drew a magnificent bracelet from her arm and gave it to the priest, who went his way into a city not far off.

Here he took the bracelet to a wealthy merchant to sell, and the latter gave him nearly a cartload of gold in exchange for it. He was so much excited by the beautiful jewel of which he had become the possessor that he begged the Brahmin to tell him its history, and he thus heard all about the lovely lady and the little Jelkorun living alone in the grass-hut in the jungle.

The very next day the merchant rode to the spot, which the Brahmin had pointed out to him. Now, this man was a mixture of good and bad, as you will find most people are really ; therefore, when he saw the lovely jewellery the Rani wore, his avarice made him wish to possess, or, at any rate, control, so much wealth ; and the kindness which was in him made him wish to see so delicate a lady and so young a child better housed and cared for. So he asked the Rani to come home with him and join his family, where she should have the place of a sister, and said he would look after the little Jelkorun and be an uncle to him.

The Rani agreed, and, saying her name was

Gulabi (a rose), went to the merchant's home and gladly joined his family circle.

So matters went on until Jelkorun had grown from a baby to a boy, and from a boy nearly to a man.

One day the merchant was going out to hunt, and Jelkorun went to him and begged to be allowed to go too.

"Very well," laughed his adopted uncle, "there is a horse in the last stall of the stable which you may have."

Jelkorun rushed to the stables, but found to his disgust that the horse his uncle had given him leave to ride was an old creature which hobbled on three legs. It had limped into the merchant's paddock years ago and he had been too kind-hearted to turn it out again. No one had ever ridden it—for who wanted to ride a three-legged hack?

Jelkorun, however, thought it was better than nothing, so he saddled the horse and led it outside; but the instant he mounted its back two great wings suddenly extended from its sides and the horse rose into the air.

Jelkorun sat still and enjoyed his wonderful aerial ride, only now and then patting the magic horse. All the kingdoms of the earth passed beneath him, and at last were left behind.

They crossed a great river and then flew over precipitous mountains, and finally reached the land of the fairies. Here the horse alighted.

They were in a beautiful valley, full of flowers and shaded by thick trees. Near by was a wide but shallow lake, and in it a number of fairies were bathing. As soon as they saw the horse and the young man, they seized their embroidered clothes, which lay on the bank, and fled out of sight. But one of them dropped her slipper as she ran, and Jelkorun picked it up and put it in the bosom of his tunic. Then he mounted his horse again, turned its head homewards, and was soon winging his way back to the merchant's stables.

When he had arrived, he fed the magic horse and made it happy and comfortable, and then he went into the house, where his uncle, returned from hunting, laughingly asked him if he had enjoyed his ride.

Jelkorun said he had had a beautiful ride, but did not tell him any details, nor anything about the horse's wonderful powers. Only he gave him the slipper, which he said he had picked up on the way.

When the merchant saw it, he was quite overwhelmed, for the loveliness of the little slipper was beyond description.

"What can I do with such a marvellous thing?" he said. "This ought to belong to no one but the Raja. I shall make a journey to his capital and give a present to him, of which this shall be the most costly item."

So he set out to the capital and received an

audience from the Raja Jelkorun, who was graciously pleased to accept his offering.

The slipper filled even the Raja with amazement and admiration.

"I do not think I have anything so beautiful in all my treasury," he said. "But there is only one: where is the other?"

"Alas! Cherisher of the Poor," said the merchant, "I have but this one to offer you, and I do not know where the pair to it is."

Now, the Raja Jelkorun probably thought that he was keeping the other one for himself, or to give to some other Raja, and he was determined not to allow anyone else to possess so great a treasure.

He ordered the merchant to get him the pair to it at once, and when the man protested, he became very angry and declared that unless the fellow slipper was given to him within a month, he would have the merchant executed, together with all his family.

So the poor man returned home, very sad.

When he saw the young Jelkorun, he began lamenting, and cried:

"This is what has come of my giving a home to you and your mother, that I and all my family must be destroyed. Would that I had never set eyes on you!" and he would have beaten him in his despair, had not Jelkorun exclaimed:

"Do not beat me, Uncle. Where this one was are many more; and if you will come with me, I can

get you, not only a fellow for this slipper, but a hundred such."

Then he took his uncle to the stable, and they both together mounted the old hack whose stall was at the end ; but to the magic horse the double weight was as nothing, and he rose in the air and flew away as easily as if there were no load upon his back at all.

Again the kingdoms of the earth passed beneath them, and again they winged their way to the land of the fairies ; but this time there were no fairies bathing in the beautiful valley, and Jelkorun left the *bania* * there while he flew down to a palace which he could see at the foot of a precipice not far away. He had noticed that this was the direction in which the fairies had fled.

The palace was as splendid inside as it was out—as splendid as only a fairy palace can be ; but the rooms were deserted and silent as the prince passed through them.

At length he came to a wonderful bedroom, where everything was embroidered with marvellous Indian flowers in green and pink, blue and pale yellow, while the walls and pillars of pure white alabaster were pierced and inlaid with mother-of-pearl and jasper, onyx, and jacinth, in scintillating flowers of every hue. In the centre of the room was a bed of scented sandalwood inlaid with ivory and ebony,

* *Bania* = merchant.

and on the many silken cushions lay a girl—none other, as Jelkorun saw at once, than the beautiful fairy whose slipper he had stolen on his last visit. She seemed quite dead, and Jelkorun noticed that across her feet lay a plain wooden wand; which he might not have noticed at all except that its very plainness was so marked amid all the surrounding gorgeousness. Jelkorun picked it up, and instantly the fairy moved and awoke to consciousness once more; and as the Prince had an handsome, kindly face and attractive manners, she seemed much more pleased than sorry to see him there.

She told him that she was in the power of a mighty Djinn, who took all life from her when he left her alone, by placing the magic wand across her feet, and it was the removing of this wand which had made her come to life just then; and Jelkorun told her of the theft of her slipper and the trouble it had caused them, and how he had come back to try to get another to match. She had just promised to give it to him when there was a rushing sound outside, as of a hurricane or an earthquake approaching. The fairy had only time to turn Jelkorun into a tiny fly, replace the wand over her own feet and lie down quite still, when the huge Djinn came in.

The first thing he did was to awaken the fairy, and then he began storming and sniffing all about the palace.

"I can smell human flesh," he cried. "There has been a man about here!"

The little fly crept into a carving on the wall and watched from there, and the fairy said:

"How can I tell who may or who may not have been here in your absence? Did you not take all life from me when you left?"

So the Djinn got no satisfaction, and at last settled down to a pleasant evening meal of sweet-meats and fruit with the fairy.

But she pretended to be sad and thoughtful, and at last answered all the Djinn's many inquiries by saying:

"I have been wondering what would happen to me if you were to die when away on your travels. It is very unlikely that anyone would come here to remove the spell and give me life again—and I should lie here forgotten and dead——"

But the Djinn interrupted her.

"There is no fear of my dying," he said. "The secret of my life is too well hidden for anyone to discover it."

But she still continued to lament; and so, to console her, he told her the secret, for he was really in his heart fond of the beautiful fairy, although he was so tyrannical with her.

"In the seventh room from this," he said, "is a box, and inside the box is a small basket, and in one of the grass-plaits of the basket lives a tiny

beetle. Until the beetle is killed I shall live, and who could find so small a thing or guess that secret?"

The little fly in the hole of the wall heard everything the Djinn had said.

All night he stayed there, and next morning, when the Djinn—having as usual made the fairy unconscious—had departed, the fly came down, and, with the man's strength that was in him, removed the wand.

The fairy sat up instantly, and changed Jelkorun into his own shape again, and he hurried straight to the seventh room, found the wooden box, opened it, and took out the basket.

Directly the basket was touched the Djinn felt it, and he began to hasten back as fast as he could.

Meanwhile the Prince was hunting among the fine straw-plaits to get the beetle, and it was no easy task to find it. Then, just as the rush of the approaching Djinn was heard outside the palace, he spied a small hole in one of the grasses, and, tearing it open, he saw the beetle and crushed it at once. So the Djinn died.

The fairy was overjoyed at regaining her freedom, and Jelkorun had no trouble in persuading her to go with him to the land of mortals to see his mother, for in the short time he had been with her he felt he could not live long far apart from her.

They gathered together a store of valuable things

and placed them in a box, which the two of them could easily carry, and then they went outside to find the magic horse.

But the horse had grown tired of waiting, and had flown back to the pastures of the valley above, where he was quietly grazing, and where the *bania* was waiting with some anxiety.

The fairy wanted to fly up there at once, but the Prince felt she was too beautiful and too gorgeously dressed to be seen by everyone, and persuaded her to get into the chest with some of the treasures. Then he carried the box to the foot of the precipice, and called his uncle, who came to the top and looked down.

"Lower a rope," the Prince cried out, "and get up this box; and then let it down again for me to climb up by."

The merchant cut a long, strong creeper from a tree near by, and let down one end of it.

"What have you got in the box?" he shouted.

"The most precious thing I could find in yonder palace," laughed Jelkorun, and you may be sure the merchant pulled all the harder when he heard that!

His curiosity was so great that as soon as he had got the box over the edge of the precipice, he forgot all about lowering the rope again to the Prince, but hurried out of sight with the treasure and peeped inside.

There lay the lovely fairy, too beautiful to imagine,

while he prepared himself as soon as possible for a journey to the capital. He intended to give the fairy to Jelkorun as a slave-girl.

When he reached the Raja's palace, and was granted an audience, he threw himself on the ground in a deep "salaam," and said :

"Oh, Cherisher of the Poor, I have brought you the pair to the slipper which you did me the honour to accept a short while ago. May I find favour in your sight, Oh Mighty One !"

Then the fairy was brought in, with one of her pretty feet bare, but on the other the fellow to the slipper which the Raja Jelkorun already possessed.

When the Raja heard that the girl herself was included in the present, he knew not how to repay the *bania* sufficiently, and heaped honours and riches on him beyond his highest hopes ; but, as for the fairy, he announced his intention of marrying her and making her Rani in the place of Gulab.

The fairy, however, objected. She was sad and mournful, for she remembered the young Jelkorun who had rescued her from the power of the genius, and she would much rather have married him.

"I will marry no one," she said, "until I have heard what became of the young Jelkorun," and because of her beauty and fascination, and perhaps also because of her magic power, the old Jelkorun humoured her and caused a great proclamation to be sent abroad, promising a reward to anyone who

could give the required information—although, of course, he did not know at the time it was his own son he was inquiring about.

A great many people came and told him about this Jelkorun and that Jelkorun, but it was never the right one. At last they had heard the history of nearly every Jelkorun in the kingdom, but the fairy was not satisfied. She grew sadder every day, and was just as obstinate as ever about her wedding.

Then one day there limped into the gate of the great city a poor miserable cripple; his clothes were in rags and his hair unkempt, and he looked nearly as ugly and dreadful as the lepers one sees sometimes in Eastern streets. He begged for service, but none would give it to him, until at last a kind-hearted oil merchant employed him to carry round the coarser kinds of oil for sale in the most evil parts of the city; and that, you must know, is very mean work indeed for anyone, but still more so from an Oriental point of view.

But the King's crier went even into the poorest quarters of the town, and so it happened that the crippled oil-vendor heard the proclamation about Jelkorun.

"I can tell you his whole history," he said; and he made his way at once to the Raja's palace.

When he arrived there, the sepoys on guard were very unwilling to let him in; but the Raja was riding

by with his escort, and stopped to listen to the altercation, and he was so anxious to have the matter settled that he would not allow even this chance to pass untried.

The dirty oil-vendor was taken into the great Hall of Audience, and the Raja came in and ordered him to begin.

"I will tell you nothing," answered the man in a husky, rough voice, and with the very worst accent you ever heard, "unless your Honour's betrothed is here also to listen, and if she is here I can tell you about the real man whose history you wish to know."

Such a request was a very bold one, but the Raja consented even to that, only ordering everyone else out of the room when the fairy came in with her face veiled.

So they three were in the audience chamber together.

"There was once a bad Raja," croaked the dirty creature, "who turned his good, beautiful wife out into the jungles to be a prey for the wild animals, all on account of a silly wager; and if God had not taken special care of her and of the little son who was born after she had been there a short time, they would have died, and the Raja would really have been their murderer. That was you, O King Jelkorun!"

The Raja was not at all accustomed to being

spoken to in this way, and he became quite speechless—partly with rage, and partly with astonishment, for until now he never knew that he had a son at all. Nor had he ever viewed his conduct in this light before; indeed, he thought he was rather a fine fellow to have put himself to so much inconvenience as to send away his wife all for what he considered a sense of honour. (Which only shews!!)

Then the oilman continued to tell the story of Jelkorun's life with the *bania* and the adventures in the land of the fairies and his rescue by Father Adam and Mother Eve.

"Jelkorun," he continued, "journeyed many days until he reached the gates of his father's capital. There he rubbed himself with the ointment Mother Eve had given him, for he did not wish to be recognized on his first arrival. Hideous and loathsome in the eyes of all, he entered, and sought employment, and is now earning a mean livelihood as a vendor of oil in the slums of this place."

The Raja half rose from his chair with a cry of mingled yearning for his son and his lost wife, and bitter, offended pride at the thought of his son's occupation; but the miserable object before him made a sudden move towards a brazier of charcoal, which stood by to scent the hall with burning incense. Upon this he flung a hair, and leaned over into the smoke which arose.

Instantly the grey skin cleared and became firm

and brown, the crooked limbs straightened, the rags seemed to shrivel, and were replaced by a Prince's attire, and the younger Jelkorun stood before them, far more beautiful than he had ever been before.

The fairy's joy at regaining him was great; and the Raja forgave the hard things he had said, in his pride and delight in possessing such a handsome son.

The Rani Gulabi was sent for and restored to her rightful place, with added honour because of her noble conduct; the merchant who had befriended her received still greater rewards than before; and of course the younger Jelkorun married the fairy as soon as sufficiently magnificent preparations could be made. Eventually, he succeeded to his father's throne and reigned well and long.

The magic horse formed part of the merchant's wedding-present to Jelkorun and his bride, and it was given the best stall in the royal stables and quite a retinue of *syces** to look after it.

* *Syce* = groom.

CHAPTER III

DEATH AND THE FOUR DOORS

"AYAH, will the rains never come? See how the mosquitoes have bitten me!"—and Saidée held out a little hand, swollen and blotched with red.

"Another week, I have heard, and we shall have the monsoon here, and then we shall be so cool, we shall forget all about the heat," said the old soul, soothingly. "I will ask the memsahib for some *dawai** for thy hand, Heart's Delight, and I will see there are no mosquitoes inside thy curtains to-night to molest thee. Wilt thou have a story?"

There is no need to say what Saidée's answer was.

Here is the tale, then, which Ayah told, and which made Saidée forget for a few breathless moments the sultry waiting of India for the storm-burst of the Heaven-sent monsoon.

DEATH AND THE FOUR DOORS.

There was once a Raja who had great possessions but no son to inherit them, and he would have given half he owned for an heir.

* *Dawai*=medicine.

One night in a dream he was told that at last a son should be born to his house; but that the boy's life would be short, and as soon as he was grown up he must die.

The Raja's feelings were of mixed joy and sorrow, but when at last the prophecy came true, he loved his son all the more intensely, because he had waited for him so long and must lose him so soon.

He told no one of the secret sorrow in his heart, however, until his son was full grown and was of an age to marry. Then, much as he longed to see him united to one of the neighbouring Princesses, his conscience would hardly allow him to suggest an alliance which should so soon turn the bride into a widow, for in India the fate of a young widow is the very saddest that can happen to any girl.

Luckily, the Raja had a very wise and trusted Vizier, and he at last took this man into his confidence, and asked his advice about his son's wedding. The Vizier had no advice to offer on the spot, but begged for twenty-four hours in which to consider the matter. He did this so frequently about affairs of State that the Raja thought nothing of it, nor did he suspect the real reason.

The Vizier had one daughter, called Chandni, who was as good as she was beautiful, and so gifted with wisdom that her father was accustomed to ask her

advice about any question of diplomacy or State where he doubted his own judgment.

When he had laid the matter of the Prince and his wedding before Chandni, the girl was so filled with pity for the young man and his father, and so conscious of the dilemma the latter was in, that she considered a minute or two in silence; then she said :

“ Oh, my father, if it be your will, let me marry the Prince. It may be that some means will be found to stay the hand of Fate; but if it be written upon his forehead that he must die young and his wife be soon a widow, to me be granted the blessing of making his last few days happy.”

At first her father would not hear of such a thing, for he loved his daughter intensely; but at last she so won upon him with her sweet insistence that he carried her proposal to the King.

The Raja, who knew of her beauty and wisdom, and was well aware that she came of noble blood, did not withhold his consent, and the Prince was delighted with all he heard about the bride-elect, so the marriage was speedily arranged, and the preparations carried out with as little delay as possible.

The bride made one peculiar request. She had a small pavilion or pleasure-house built in the jungle outside the city, in which to spend her honeymoon. This house stood in a garden on high ground near

the main road, and was square, with one door in each of its four sides.

When the marriage ceremony was over, Chandni and her husband went to the pavilion in the jungle, and after a collation had been served to the newly-married pair, the bride dismissed all her servants, and herself waited upon the Prince. Before retiring, however, she carefully closed all four doors and set a guard at each. On the threshold of the north door she laid some rice, and said :

“Guard him well, O Grain !”

At the south door she set fire in a *chirag*, and said :

“Guard him well, O Fire !”

At the east door she laid a handful of earth, and said :

“Guard him well, O Earth !”

And on the west she poured water, and said :

“Guard him well, O Water ?”

When the night was far spent, Death came to the north door and knocked for admittance, for he had come for the soul of the Raja's son.

But the rice that was on guard said :

“You cannot enter here. If you pass this portal I will cause all my children to wither and be barren, and a great famine shall sweep over the land, and then heavy will be your work, O Death !”

So Death turned away from that door, and sought entrance at the east.

Here the earth was on guard, and this, too, spoke :

“ Pass not by here, or I will shake and heave throughout my length and breadth, and many shall fall by my quakings, and others shall need you for the pestilence which I will send abroad. Do you wish for so much work as that, Great Death ?”

And Death, who was weary, did not wish it, and turned away.

Next he came to the south door, and here the fire shot up and barred the way.

“ Back, O Death !” it said. “ If you pass me by and enter, I will send forth my flames to devastate the earth and swallow up forests and men and beasts. Would so great work suit thee ?”

And Death turned aside.

At the west door the water was on guard, and that, too, threatened Death with work from flood and tempest if an entrance was forced.

Soon the morning broke, and Death, leaving the attempt to gain the Prince’s soul for the present, took his departure.

Chandni, listening within, heard all, but knew that she would still have to be very watchful, for Death would be sure to come again soon.

One day, as she looked along the road, she saw an old and crippled woman coming through the heat and dust. She knew at once that this was Death come in disguise to try and effect an entrance into the pavilion.

Without hesitating, she rose and went towards the old woman, carrying with her cool, fresh water in a basin.

"Mother," said the Princess, gently, "rest here in the shade while I bathe your feet from the dust of the road."

With her own soft little hands she poured the scented water over the tired feet, and the old woman looked down, refreshed, and blessed her.

"What can I give you in exchange for what you have done for me?" asked the old cripple, not suspecting that Chandni had seen through the disguise.

Then the young wife prostrated herself at the feet of Death and prayed for the life of her husband.

But Death was sad, for the boon was not his to give.

"I serve a higher Power," he said, "and do but obey orders. Where I am told to go, I go, being but a servant."

"Then," said the Princess, growing bolder, "go back to that Great One and ask of Him this boon that I crave of thee. Surely He will relent and grant that which is so little a thing in itself—the life of just one man."

Death rose and turned his back upon the pavilion.

"If I do not return to-morrow," he said, "you will know that your prayer has been granted"; and he passed away out of Chandni's sight.

And Death did not come back the next day, nor the next, nor the next; and Chandni and her Prince lived to see their sons and daughters grow up to honour around them; and Chandni herself was held in higher and higher love and reverence by her father and her King, her husband and her children and her people.

CHAPTER IV

THE BREAKING OF THE MONSOON

THE night pressed down like a pall flung over the living. Outside, in the compound, near the servants' houses, the natives had dragged their *charpoys** from the unbearable stuffiness of their little rooms, and lay, courting sleep, on the bare string meshes of the little rough wooden bedsteads, or more often talking together in low monotonous voices, for even to them sleep would not always come on such a night as this.

In the bungalow, the punkahs had been ceaselessly waving day and night for several weeks. They were a source of incessant annoyance to Mr. Vansittart, because they were always scattering his papers into far-away corners of the *daftar*,† where the *munshi*‡ and *babus*§ had to make undignified dives after them; and Mrs. Vansittart disliked them because they made her hair untidy. But the relays of punkah coolies who pulled the cane backwards and forwards

* *Charpoys* = native bedsteads.

† *Munshi* = interpreter.

† *Daftar* = office.

§ *Babus* = clerks.

through a hole in the wall (lined with an old bottle-neck to prevent chafing) were a source of great interest to Saidée, who wanted to talk to them, and thereby greatly shocked the Ayah.

But, to-night, even the punkah coolie failed them, and responded listlessly to Umma's "*Kencho, Je!*"* There would be a few spasmodic tugs in reply, and then the slow "flap-flap" which seemed hardly to move the leaden air.

Everything, everything seemed waiting, breathlessly.

And yet, with it all, in spite of the silence and the stillness, and the intense heat, there was an odd sense of unrest abroad. Saidée felt it, and it frightened her a little.

"Ayah," she called, "are you there?"

"I am here," said the old woman.

"Come close, Ayah, I am frightened and I can't sleep, and I am so hot! Can't we have a light?"

"Better not," said Umma; "it will draw in all the insects."

"Shall I tell thee a tale?" And without waiting, she sat down on the ground beside the child's pillow, gently fanning her and telling the following story:

* *Kencho, Je* = "Pull, you there!"

THE PRINCE WHO LEARNED WISDOM.

There was once a wise and careful Raja, whose only son, however, was very unlike him, for he was stupid and careless. At last the Raja decided to send the Prince away to eat the air of other countries and see if he could not learn wisdom in travelling. So the Prince was given a good horse and plenty of money in his saddle-bags, and started off alone and unattended.

He rode for a long time, and at last he saw a *fakir** sitting by the side of the highway.

"Where are you going?" asked the *fakir*, of the stupid Prince.

"I am going to learn wisdom!" said the Raja's son.

"I can give you a little of that," said the mendicant, "only you must pay me well for it. It is expensive stuff."

"Very well," answered the other, "I will give you whatever you ask."

"Then," said the *fakir*, "here is something it would be wise of you to take great care of"—and he placed in the Prince's hand a clod of earth—"and remember that it is wisest not to travel alone. Now, you must give me a hundred rupees for the wisdom I have taught you."

* *Fakir*=religious mendicant.

The Prince paid the hundred rupees and rode on with the clod in the his hand; but before long it seemed to grow heavy and he became tired of holding it and threw it away.

The clod of earth struck the ground just below a *baer*-tree † and at once changed into a beautiful Peri.

"Oh, traveller," called the Peri after the Prince, "wait for me and take me with you. Two are better than one to journey on together."

The Prince was very much puzzled where the lovely lady could have come from, but he turned back and took her up behind him on the saddle, and the two rode on until they came to a river.

As they drew near, they heard a strange noise, and presently a huge python glided past, pursuing a large frog. The snake was just about to seize his exhausted prey, when the Peri said to the Prince:

"Quick! Cut your foot and let the blood run into this brass bowl and give it to the snake to drink, so that the frog may escape."

Without considering the pain it would cause, he did as he was told, and was just in time. The snake drank up the blood and the frog hopped away.

When the travellers had passed on a short distance, the snake glided after the frog, who was recovering himself.

"Do not be frightened," said the snake, "I shall

† *Baer*-tree = tree with red and orange berries of the size of cherries.

not eat you now, for I am satisfied and no longer hungry. That man who has just given me his blood to drink strikes me as being a good man, even if he is stupid. Shall we agree to a truce, and follow after to see if we can help him?—for we both owe him a debt of gratitude, seeing that he has given me a breakfast and has saved your life.”

The frog agreed, and the snake—for snakes have wonderful power—changed himself into a Brahmin and the frog into a fisherman, and they ran after the two who had ridden on ahead, shouting :

“ Oh, travellers ! — Oh, travellers ! Wait for us ! ”

“ Where can these men have come from ? ” asked the Prince. “ I saw no one as we rode by but a python and a frog. ”

The Peri smiled, but only said :

“ Let them join us ! Four are better than two to travel on together. ”

In a short time they all reached a large city ; and here the Prince, at the instigation of the Peri, decided to stop ; for he had grown so fond of her that he did everything she told him ; and, as for her, she readily consented to marry him and be his wife.

So they hired two houses in the city, side by side ; and in one lived the Prince and the Peri, and in the other lived the Brahmin and the fisherman.

The money which the Prince had brought with him, however, soon came to an end ; and the Peri,

in order to get more, told him to go every morning and evening to the Badshah's justice-hall and fire off a salute of four shots in front of it.

For several days he did so, until at last the Badshah's curiosity was roused and he sent to ask who he was.

"I am a soldier," said the Prince, concealing his real rank.

"Then do you want service?" asked the Badshah, who liked the look of him.

"I don't know. I must go home and ask," he answered.

When he reached his house, he asked his wife whether he should take service with the Badshah.

"Yes," she said, "but mind that you insist upon being paid a thousand gold *takhas** a day; and when they ask you what you can do to earn so much, just say you will do whatever all the other people can't do." And the Prince went back and gave the answer.

The Badshah was delighted.

"He will be a useful person to have about," he said, "although his pay is high," and he engaged the Prince as a sepoy on his own terms.

But day after day went by and nothing had to be done which could not be done by everyone else, and so the sepoy did no work but grew very rich.

* *Takha*=a small piece of native money.

. One morning, the Peri looked out of her window and saw the barber's wife hurrying in the direction of the palace.

"Oh, barber's wife," she called, "come here and cut my hair and nails and dye my finger-tips."

But the barber's wife called back :

"I can't ! I must go to the palace and attend to the Badshah's wife first."

Then the Peri grew angry and sent out servants who insisted on the barber's wife coming to her first of all. When the woman saw the beauty of the sepoy's wife, she was astonished. After she had cut the Peri's hair, she was given some wonderful perfume to put upon it, such as she had never smelt in all her life before ; and, at the end of her services, the Peri gave her a gold mohur for her trouble.

"The Badshah's wife only gives me two pice for cutting her hair," she thought. "I wish this one were Queen," and she went on to the palace, feeling very unamiable towards the real Queen.

As soon as she entered the private apartments, the smell of the scent which hung about her hands attracted the Queen's notice and she asked from whence it came.

"I have no such lovely perfume in all my palace," she said.

"You !" said the barber's wife, crossly. "Of course you haven't ! I have just been cutting the hair and nails of the new sepoy's wife, and that is

the scent she puts on her hair. She is fifty times more beautiful than you are; and, what is more, she gave me a gold mohur for my services, and you only give me two pice."

The barber's wife continued to be cross with the Queen, and when she had received her customary pay, went back grumbling to her husband and told him the events of the day.

"How I wish the sepoy's wife were Queen!" she said. "What a good time we poor people would have then. Such *bakshish* and such good pay! But I don't suppose it could be managed."

"I'm not so sure of that," said her husband; and these two wicked people put their heads together to make a plot against the sepoy, in order that he might be killed and his wife left free.

When the barber went to shave the Badshah next day, he began at once to speak of his wife's experience with the beautiful Peri, and of her beauty, and the costliness and good taste of her surroundings.

"But the sepoy does nothing in return for all your goodness, Cherisher of the Poor," continued the wily man. "Why do you not make him work, and test the power he says he has?"

But the Badshah could think of nothing which he needed done which could not be done quite well by his other servants.

"Well," said the barber, "suppose you throw that ring you wear on your finger into the big river

yonder, and tell him to fish it out again. Then, if he cannot, he would deserve nothing but death at your hands after the wealth you have heaped upon him, and you could marry his beautiful wife."

The Badshah agreed to try the sepoy (as he thought him), and, flinging the ring into the deep and rapid river, told him he was to recover it before the next morning.

The Prince went home very sad, but his friend the fisherman saw him, and asked what was the matter.

When he had been told, he said :

"Do not worry. Only come at twelve o'clock to-night and lead me to the spot on the bank from whence the ring was cast into the river, and I will get it for you again."

Accordingly, at twelve o'clock, they set out together, and when they reached the shore, the fisherman told the Prince to turn his back and shut his eyes. Rapidly then he resumed his form of a frog, dived into the water, and brought the ring to the surface in his mouth.

"Is this what you want?" he asked; and the Prince, opening his eyes and turning, saw the fisherman with the ring in his hand.

When it was returned next morning to the Badshah, the wonder was great on all sides, and the sepoy was praised and rewarded.

But the barber was not at all abashed, and renewed his insidious suggestions.

"That was much too easy," he told his master : "but there is one thing which has never been seen in your Court, and which it would add greatly to your glory to obtain. That is the Gulbakhauli-flower. It grows in a country deep down below the earth, and has the sweetest scent known. Make the sepoy bring it to you, and you can have great pleasure if he succeeds, and his lovely wife if he does not. He ought to do something to earn his pay."

But the barber did not really think he would be able to get the flower.

The sepoy received the order to bring the Gulbakhauli-flower before the next morning, and departed sadly to his home. His friends again saw him ; and this time it was the Brahmin who asked him what was the matter.

"Do not worry," he said when he had heard. "I will get it for you. Only come with me to the waste land outside the city at twelve o'clock to-night, and the flower shall be yours to take to the Badshah."

The Prince did as he was told, and again on reaching the appointed spot, he was ordered to shut his eyes and turn his back on his companion.

The Brahmin instantly became a snake, and, gliding beneath the ground, worked his way down through the crevices of the rock to the country where the Gulbakhauli-flower was blossoming. There he plucked it, and, carrying it carefully in his mouth back by the same way he had come, resumed

his shape of a Brahmin before he placed it in the Prince's hand.

Long before the hour came for the flower to be given to the Badshah, the people of the city knew it had arrived; for the wonderful scent, sweeter and stronger than anything in this world, penetrated the whole place, so that they awoke in the night and said to each other :

“ The Gulbakhali-flower has come !”

And, next day, when it was presented to the Badshah, amidst great rejoicing, crowds flocked from far and near to see the wonderful scarlet blossom which had the scent of all other flowers mingled in its flaming chalice.

The barber was not yet satisfied, and determined to make one more attempt.

“ Would it not be well,” he said, “ if that great waste tract outside the city were made into a beautiful garden, with orchards and tanks and canals. Surely the wonderful sepoy can do this also for the pleasure of your Honour and to your Honour's lasting glory !”

So the sepoy was ordered to do this task also, although the waste land was a thousand *kos* long and a thousand *kos* wide, and he was only given one day to do it in.

He went home feeling very melancholy.

“ My friends, the Brahmin and the fisherman, helped me before,” he thought, “ but who can do this

great thing?" and he told his wife the latest labour that had been required of him.

"It will be difficult," she said, "but I can help you to do it. Only obey me implicitly!"

First of all she sent him to buy a scythe and ordered him to get the best he could and have it made as sharp and bright as a razor; then she lay down and slept, telling him to waken her when the moon was bright.

He did as she told him, and together they went to the waste ground beyond the city, in the bright, silver moonlight.

"Now," said the Peri, "take your scythe and cut off my head and my hands and feet, and fling them as far as you can, and my blood will fertilize the ground so that it will become a lovely garden."

The Prince sprang back in horror.

"I cannot do it! How can I, who love you, do you so great a hurt?"

His wife answered:

"Nay, but you must do it; or else the task cannot be accomplished. Fear nothing: on your return home you shall find me safe and well."

So, in bitter sorrow, he did as she had told him, and behold! where her head fell, a wide tank full of fountains suddenly appeared; from each drop of her blood came up a fruit-tree, gorgeous with coloured blossoms or laden with luscious fruit according to its season. Tiny cascades came where her hands had

fallen, and from her feet came running streams and water-channels making a pleasant coolness and tinkle in the air, and feeding the roots of the flowering plants which made the whole place gay. Bright singing birds fluttered about among the branches overhead, and busy night-moths sucked honey from blooms which gleamed star-like in the brilliant tropical moonlight.

The Prince did not wait to notice all this beauty. With anxious steps, he hurried towards his home, to test whether his wife's words had been true, or whether he had lost her for ever.

Imagine his joy when she met him on the threshold, as radiant as she had ever been in all her fairy existence !

When the Badshah went out next day on his great elephant of state, with a long retinue of nobles and officials, to see the garden which had suddenly sprung into being during the night, he was completely astonished, and so delighted with the powers of the sepoy that he told him he would raise him to the rank of chief noble if he would stay in his Court and be adopted as his son.

But the sepoy would not accept until he had asked his wife, and she said :

“No. Get permission at once to go back to your own country. Your father's kingdom is larger than the Badshah's, and you have learnt enough wisdom now to rule it when the time comes.”

The Badshah was very unwilling to let him go, but at last he gave a reluctant consent; and with many presents the sepoy-Prince departed, together with his wife and two friends—the Brahmin and the fisherman.

As for the barber and *his* wife, they were completely removed from favour at Court, and were degraded from their posts, so that they came to be glad to shave anyone who would give them work; and amidst their well-deserved poverty, the woman's temper grew worse and worse, so that she became an ever-present misery to her husband and herself.

But we will return to our travellers, who were journeying back along the road by which they had originally come.

As soon as they reached the big river, the Prince was greatly surprised to see both Brahmin and fisherman, after deep *salaams*, glide back into their original shapes of python and frog.

He turned to his wife for explanation, and she laughed.

“Do you not remember cutting your foot to feed the hungry snake with your blood, and to save the life of the frog?” she asked. “In their gratitude for what you did, they assumed human shape and followed you to see if the occasion would arise in which they could repay *yōu* for your kindness.”

The Prince became thoughtful and silent, and rode on; but the Peri drooped in her saddle, and grew

more and more mournful as they neared the *baer*-tree whence she had first called out to the Prince.

"Why are you so sorrowful, dear wife?" he asked.

"Alas!" she said. "Do you remember the clod of earth you threw away beneath the *baer*-tree?"

"Yes," he said, "what of it?"—but he began to suspect.

"It was I," said the Peri.

The Prince thought for a minute.

"When we reach the *baer*-tree, will you also resume your former shape, as the Brahmin and the fisherman did?" he asked.

The fairy only wept for reply, for she loved her husband, and did not wish to leave him.

"Then," he said, drawing rein and turning his horse aside down another path, "I do not intend to go back that way at all, and I shall never permit you to travel past the *baer*-tree again."

They made a long circuit to avoid the dangerous place, and the Prince brought his wife in safety to his father's capital, where her beauty and cleverness enchanted all who saw her.

The Prince continued to go to her for counsel in all things, and to carefully follow the advice she gave him; and the result was that his father soon abdicated in his favour, for he said it was evident that his son could rule much more wisely than he himself.

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Umma Ayah had hardly finished when the whole world, earth and sky, seemed suddenly rent asunder by the most appalling flash of lightning—lightning, pink in its intensity of blinding power. Almost at the same instant came the thunder, bounding and crashing over their heads.

Ayah gave a scream and covered her face with her chuddah, and Saidée sat up gasping and trembling.

“Oh, Ayah, what is it? What has happened?”

From outside came the sound as of flood-gates burst, and of the rushing of mighty torrents.

Ayah rose to her feet.

“It is the *Burra Bursāt**,” she said, “Aie, how good, my child! Now we shall be cool.”

Saidée heard her father call out through the tumult to Mrs. Vansittart:

“Mary, do you hear that? The rains have burst.”

Outside, in the compound, there was a scene of confusion—men taking up their beds and running, but all with merriment upon their faces and relief in their hearts.

“*Wah!*” said Umma Ayah, and laughed to herself as she thought of them.

The trees bowed their heads to the welcome rain, the parched ground licked it up, the sere vegetation felt sudden happy stirrings of sap, and the panting animals rose and sniffed rapturously at the good damp smell of things.

* *Burra Bursāt*=big rains.

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Only one tree did not rejoice with the rest—one, riven through the heart and blackened by a long burnt line where the lightning had struck it when the monsoon had given its first herald trumpet-blast.

CHAPTER V

THE MAGIC DRUM

FOR a week or two Saidée found plenty of amusement in the changed conditions which surrounded her, and Ayah had a very easy time. There were not nearly so many demands for fairy-stories, or for native games, such as *Utkan*, *Butkan*, *di chitaken*, with its puzzling suggestions which were so fascinating to follow ; or for the one Saidée called "*Chirya, Chirya, pani lao*" *—which might for all the world be a kindergarten game in its ancient modernity ; and Umma's fingers had a rest from the finger-plays in which she was so accomplished.

Instead, Saidée was quietly happy all day long in the now cool veranda, or watching from the nursery windows how the birds enjoyed their baths and the little lizards came out awakened by the refreshing wetness.

The native servants splashed through the puddles with comfortable bare toes. Even Mr. Vansittart

† *Chirya, pani lao* = "Birdie, bring water."

laid aside his official halo one morning, and went out bareheaded in the rain with his house-slippers on, and quite evidently enjoyed himself. Saidée saw him, and it made her want to paddle, too. Mrs. Vansittart also saw him, and sent his *bearer** with a dry pair of socks and shoes.

Among the most delightful to watch were the little grey squirrels, who were almost the only creatures who did not seem quite sure from the very beginning that they really liked the rain. They would peep out, and then frisk back again, as if afraid to wet their pretty coats, and finally scamper along the ground from tree to tree, trying to hold their tails over their backs—"like umbrellas," Saidée said. She had accepted without doubt Ayah's explanation of the three black stripes upon the backs of these little grey squirrels.

When Khuda—that is, God—created the first one, even He was struck with its beauty, and, saying, "What a pretty little animal!" He stroked its back, and the three stripes thus made remained dark upon the grey fur.

Certain obvious ideas about the conditions of the Almighty Fingers occurred to Saidée, but she explained them quite satisfactorily to herself by thinking that the Hand had just been busy modelling things out of clay.

Still, a day did come when the first rapture and

* *Bearer* = valet.

novelty of the rains had worn off, and Ayah was installed once more as head story-teller.

She told the tale of the "Magic Drum," and here it is :

THE MAGIC DRUM.

Once upon a time, in a village a long way away, an old woman and her daughter lived in a hut of mud and grass. The old woman had done her growing, but the daughter grew and grew and grew, until at last she was quite big ; and then her mother found her a husband in a village on the other side of the forest, and settled down to a solitary existence.

But this kind of life was very lonely ; and after the harvest was gathered in and the field-work done, she said :

"I will go and visit my daughter and my son-in-law, and see how they are getting on."

She had not much belonging to her, but she put on her best clothes and tied the rest into a little bundle, and, with her bundle on her head, she set out to walk to the neighbouring *gdon*.*

The *Burhya*† had not gone far into the forest when she was met by a Jackal.

Now, the Jackal was a very crafty person.

"Good-day, *Burhya*," he said ; "where are you going ?"

* *Gdon*=village.

† *Burhya*=old woman.

"I am going to see my daughter, who lives on the other side of the forest," she answered.

"*Aré !*" exclaimed the Jackal, "but you look very nice! I have been without food for several days, and my eyes are dropping out from hunger. I think I will eat you!"

Now, the Jackal, as I have told you, was a very crafty person; but the old woman was craftier, and so she said:

"Ah, no, then Mr. Jackal; don't eat me yet! Just see how thin I am! Wait till I have been to my daughter's, and eaten a lot, and drunk no end of milk, and sat down doing no work, and become fat. It would be better for you to eat me when I come back from my visit."

So the Jackal let her go, and the Burhya travelled on unmolested and reached her daughter's house in safety.

In her daughter's house she sat down, doing no work, and she ate and drank and grew very fat indeed; so that when the time came for her to return to her own home she felt quite nervous.

She told her daughter of her anxiety.

"You see," she said, "there are so many animals in the jungle, and I have grown so *very* fat—they will all want to eat me!"

The daughter was even cleverer than her mother, and at last she thought of a plan by which to outwit the animals, and the Jackal in particular.

She made a magic drum, so large that her mother could get inside, and all the Burhya had to say when she wished it to roll on was :

“Rub-a-dub, rub-a-dub, rub-a-dub, oh, my drum !
The old woman trundles wherever you come.
Rub-a-dub, rat-a-plan, rub-a-dub, rat-a-plan !
Get over the ground just as fast as you can.”

The two women bade each other a very loving farewell, and then the daughter shut her mother up inside the drum, the magic words were spoken, and the drum rolled along the road into the forest.

The Jackal had been thinking that the old woman had had quite enough time to get fat in, so he was on the lookout, but he could not understand the mysterious thing which he saw trundling down the road towards him.

“Hullo ! hullo !” he said, “whatever is this coming ? I’ll stop this roly-poly business and find out !”

So, because (as you know) he was a very crafty person, he put a large stone in the path, directly in the way the drum was coming, and lay down in the long yellow grass beside it to see what would happen.

The drum came rolling on until it reached the big stone, and there it stopped ; but the old woman began her magic verse again :

“Rub-a-dub, rub-a-dub, rub-a-dub, oh, my drum !
The old woman trundles wherever you come.
Rub-a-dub, rat-a-plan, rub-a-dub, rat-a-plan !
Get over the ground as fast as you——”

"Aha!" cried the Jackal, "I know that voice; it's the Burhya come at last." And he jumped upon the drum, broke it to pieces, and made the old woman get out.

When the Jackal saw how plump the Burhya had become he was quite delighted, and he called out to the other animals in the jungle near by:

"See here, what a fine fat old woman has come for us to eat. We will have a real feast now."

So the hyena came, and the wolf, and the panther, and all the animals of the forest, and they sat looking at the poor old Burhya with very hungry eyes.

She was very much frightened, but she heard the sound of a river near by, and an idea came suddenly to her.

"Oh, good animals!" she cried, "do wait a minute! I am very thirsty. Just let me go down to the river and have a drink of water, and I shall taste much nicer then."

So the animals let her go down to the river, but they took care to go with her, so that they might keep an eye upon her movements. When they had all reached the brink of the river the Burhya said:

"You must let me go quite into the middle of the stream. I can't get enough to drink here, and I am so very thirsty."

So they let her go right into the middle of the river, and the animals sat upon the bank and watched.

She drank and drank and drank and drank, until they thought she was never going to stop; and she drank and drank until she was quite full of water, full up to her very throat.

Then she came out of the river.

The animals got up to begin their dinner, but she begged of them not to go behind her, and just as they were all coming towards her from the front she said, "Ouch!" and sent all the water she had swallowed straight into their faces.

While they were rubbing their eyes to get the water out, the Burhya turned and ran as she had never run before, and she ran so fast that they never caught her; and so she reached her village and her home without being eaten up.

CHAPTER VI

MORE ABOUT THE JACKAL.

“Now, to-day there is but time for a little one, my child,” said the old native woman. “The boots have taken me so long that I must be going to eat my bread quite soon, and thou shalt have a long one to-morrow to make up. *Aré*, but what with keeping the clothes and the memsahib’s gloves aired, and dusting the green mould off the boots and shoes every day, the rains make much work! Bring thy *morah** near the *tahpa*,† little one, and so I can turn and dry the clothes while I talk.”

Ayah was busy with a large dome-shaped erection of wickerwork, inside which stood a little charcoal brazier full of red embers. She spread the linen over the outside of the *tahpa*, and turned it frequently, so that it should be quite dried but not scorched. It must be confessed that all ayahs are not so deft or careful as Umma.

“It is more about the Jackal I will tell thee,” said

* *Morah* = little wicker stool.

† *Tahpa* = used to dry clothes.

the old woman, pausing to fan the charcoal embers to a ruddier glow with her square palm-matting fan, "and it is called 'The Jackal's Wisdom.'"

THE JACKAL'S WISDOM.

There was once a sepoy who was travelling in search of service. He had with him a mare and her foal.

One evening he reached a small village in the midst of the jungle, and decided to stop the night there. He put up at a *sarai*,* or rest-house, in the outhouses of which there were already a great many cattle tethered. He gave chopped hay and peas to his mare, and then laid down beside her to sleep.

Next morning, when he awoke, he cooked and ate his whole-meal *chapatis*,† and then prepared to go on his way with his animals, when the villager to whom the cattle belonged came up and seized the little foal.

"What are you doing?" asked the sepoy.

"I'm only taking away my cow's foal," answered the other.

"Did one ever hear of a cow having a foal?" said the sepoy. "Can't you see that is a young horse?"

* *Sarai*=rest-house for natives.

† *Chapati*=flat unleavened cake.

But the other persisted, and made such a noise that a crowd of villagers soon collected about the opponents; and as they were mostly relations or friends of the owner of the cows, the sepoy found himself in a serious minority, and was obliged, being outnumbered, to give in.

He therefore left the mocking villagers, and rode away on his mare into the jungle, lamenting.

He had not gone far when he came upon a Jackal sitting by the side of the road.

“What is the matter, man?” asked the Jackal.

The sepoy told him in what a barefaced manner the villager had cheated him out of his foal, by pretending it was a young cow.

“Well, I have no objection to judging the matter for you, and giving you all the help I can,” said the Jackal, officiously. “But, of course, I should have to go to the village to hear all sides of the question, and you must promise to protect me against the pariah dogs. I have a notion that I can get you back your foal.”

The sepoy, delighted at the idea of recovering his stolen property, promised to guard the Jackal well, and returned with him to the village.

The men of the place were seated on the ground round the midday *hookah* when the sepoy returned, and they were very much surprised to see him and his companion.

Hookah = pipe.

"I have come," said the Jackal, "to judge between you people and this man, with regard to a young horse of his, which he says you have taken from him by false pretences."

"It was a young cow!" said the men.

"Be kind enough to enlarge your circle, and allow me to sit in the middle," said the Jackal, "and I want each one of you to tell me all he knows of the matter."

So they arranged themselves as he wished; but, while they were speaking, the Jackal seemed to pay no attention whatever, but kept on raising his head and yawning in the most enormous way.

The villagers grew irritated at last at his behaviour, and cried :

"You say you came here to judge fairly in this matter, and all the while you do nothing but yawn the top of your head off! Do listen!"

"Ah," said the Jackal, with another yawn, "please pardon me, my friends. I am so sleepy, I can hardly sit up. Last night I never slept a wink, for the river over yonder was on fire, and, of course, I wouldn't for the world lose such a beautiful sight as the water blazing."

"What a liar you are!" cried the villagers, rising angrily. "How can the river catch fire?"

"Quite as easily as for a cow to be the mother of a foal," answered the Jackal, looking round slyly.

The villagers saw that they had fallen into a trap, and all burst out laughing at the Jackal's cleverness.

Moreover, they returned the foal to the sepoy, and the Jackal and the sepoy and the two horses walked off into the jungle together.

CHAPTER VII

THE DACOITS AND THE SEPOY

"A LONG one, a long one. Ayah, you promised me a long one," said Saidée next day.

"And so thou shalt have it," answered her nurse; but she had hardly begun when the entrance of the sahib himself caused her to rise and touch her forehead in the graceful, bending salaam of the native woman. Saidée always appreciated her as she stood thus in her white draperies, for the child had the eyes of an artist.

"What would you say, Saidée, to a holiday in the hills?" asked her father, smiling. "The rains will soon be over, and you and mother and I will go to the Himalaya and have a real good time. I have got two months' leave, and we will go right away from babus and mosquitoes and petitions, and all the other tiresome things, and mother and you must get some roses in your cheeks."

"And Ayah?—will Ayah come too?"

"Why, of course! Who'd do up your buttons

for you if she didn't?" and Mr. Vansittart caught the little girl up and looked almost boyish.

"Didn't daddy look glad, and—and young?" said Saidée afterwards.

"The mountains are great and beautiful, Bachchi, and if you eat the air of the hills it makes you strong. But it is cold there—very, very cold!" and Ayah shuddered a little and drew her thin muslin chuddah closer round her at the idea.

"You shall have a nice thick shawl to wear," said the child. "I know if I ask mother for one she will give it you."

Again the old woman touched her forehead, in the pretty movement which is thanks and greeting and farewell and half-a-dozen other things, and after a little more talk of the journey before them, they settled down to the story of

THE DACOITS AND THE SEPOY.

There was once a young Indian soldier, called Daulat Singh, who left his village and marched out alone to make his fortune. India was in those days divided under the sway of various Rajas of differing importance, and the mighty name of "John Company"* had never been heard in the land.

Daulat Singh found service in the army of one

* * *John Company* = the East India Company.

of the most petty of these chieftains, and for a whole year he had a very lively time.

The country he was in was neither rich nor fertile, which kept neighbouring Rajas from coveting; but the flocks of the latter were frequently marched off by Daulat Singh and his comrades, and there were little village skirmishes all along the frontier to keep things going. Occasionally he and the rest of the army had to spread themselves out and look as big as possible when the Raja came to review them on his enormous elephant (which was a trifle lame), glittering and resplendent in gorgeous but slightly dilapidated trappings.

There was one disadvantage to all this, which was that the army seldom received any pay. So, as Daulat Singh did not seem to be getting any nearer fortune, he decided that he might as well go home and till the fields, and he sent in a very humble petition for dismissal, with a hint about his back-pay in it.

There had been a great seizure of cattle only a few days before, and, as the Raja was in a very good temper on account of this successful raid, he was graciously pleased to order that a fine buffalo cow should be given to Daulat Singh as a reward for his year's service; and the latter was told he ought to consider himself very lucky, as the Raja valued that buffalo at one hundred rupees.

Daulat thought that some of this might be dis-

counted ; but, as the animal was really a very good one, and there seemed no chance of his getting more, he started homewards, driving his booty before him.

Not many miles remained between him and his village when he overtook two men on the road.

"That's a very handsome buffalo!" remarked one of them. "Do you want to sell her?"

Daulat Singh said he should have no objection if he could get a good price, and began a conversation with the two men. He soon discovered that they were brothers, named respectively Munira and Ujira ; but, although they were much inclined to buy the buffalo, neither of them would suggest a price to give.

The owner of the buffalo had but a vague notion of it's worth ; and, at last, after much debate, Munira said :

"Are you willing to leave the matter to an umpire? I know a very clever old man who will tell us at once the value of the animal if we go to him. He lives near here."

Daulat agreed, and the whole party turned down a side path leading into the forest.

They had not gone far when the ex-sepoy became suspicious. The path they followed turned at last into a hardly-defined track passing through high yellow grass, which reached above their heads.

At last they entered a clearing in which stood an

untidy native house. Indian marigolds grew untended in front of it, and several plantain-trees waved their tattered green banners near by; but all the cultivation which was visible was a patch of sugar-cane.

Daulat Singh was therefore considerably astonished when he found that the inside of the dwelling was furnished with an abundance of articles only affected by the richer folk, and that the old man who made his appearance on their approach was swathed in embroidered Indian silks, dirty and ragged, but very costly. The floor and the charpoys were littered with expensive fabrics; and the household utensils, though unclean and ill-kept, were beautifully engraved and of great value.

While Daulat Singh was taking note of all these details, Munira and Ujira explained the cause of their visit to the old man, who listened with a sly smile.

Then, turning to Daulat, he asked :

“Do you, too, wish me to say how much your buffalo is worth?”

Three times he repeated his question, and three times Daulat Singh answered in the affirmative.

“Well, then,” he said, “I should say your buffalo is worth six takhas.”

Now, six takhas come to about twopence three farthings.

Daulat Singh had by this time thoroughly gauged his surroundings. He guessed rightly that he was in the abode of some dacoits, or robbers; and from a strong resemblance which existed between the old man and his two acquaintances of the road, he suspected that they were father and sons.

He thought it prudent, therefore, to appear to accept this; whereupon Munira opened a box full of money and jewels, took out the six takhas, and gave them to the young soldier, with an air of amused insolence which taxed all Daulat's self-control to endure.

They showed him the way back to the road, and by the same evening he was in his own home.

The next morning his wife asked him about the fortune he was to have brought home with him, but he had nothing to show her except the six little copper coins.

"What!" she screamed. "Have you only earned six takhas in a whole year?" and she began to scold him for indolence and extravagance.

"Be quiet," he answered, "and listen!"

And then he told her the whole story of the theft of his buffalo by the dacoits.

"And now, go," he added, "and borrow jewellery from all our friends and relations, and give me your best clothes. I have a plan to get back my buffalo."

While his wife was busy collecting nose-rings and earrings, bangles for the ankles and wrists, and necklaces and finger-rings of all kinds, Daulat carefully shaved his face, parted his long dark hair in the middle, and arranged it in a knot behind, after the fashion of the women, and dyed his teeth, his finger-tips, and the parting of his hair red with henna ; so that when he was finally dressed in his wife's best clothes and all the jewellery, with a splendid green and purple chuddah inwoven with gold over all, the good-looking soldier appeared like a very pretty woman.

Then he called for a *dhooli*,* and four bearers, and, taking one rupee with him, he seated himself in the *dhooli* and started for the dacoits' house. When he was in the jungle not far from it he dismissed the bearers, giving them the rupee for their trouble, and as soon as they had gone quite away, he lifted his voice up in very feminine lamentations.

It was not long before Munira and Ujira came towards the *dhooli* ; and, raising the curtains, peeped inside.

"It is a woman," said Munira, "loaded with jewels and very beautiful. I shall take her home with me and marry her."

But Ujira had seen her also, and he was inclined to dispute Munira's rights ; and while the two quarrelled as to whose wife she should be, Daulat

* *Dhooli*=covered litter used by native women.

stood aside with drooping head and a mien of the utmost modesty.

Finally, the brothers agreed to take her to their father and let him decide to whom she should belong. So they led Daulat a second time to the little house in the clearing.

When the old dacoit saw her, however, he announced his intention of not allowing either of his sons to marry the beautiful woman, as he meant to espouse her himself.

"Your mother has been dead many years," he said, "and a wife would be more of a companion to me than a daughter-in-law while you two are away foraging; and, besides, we need a woman here to keep the place in order and do the cooking."

Daulat agreed meekly to the proposal, only stipulating that the ceremony should be performed with all the pomp of circumstance which the hurry they were in permitted.

Munira was therefore despatched to summon the *mullah** to perform the service, and with money to buy various gorgeous garments for the bride and bridegroom, which Daulat declared were quite necessary for the occasion.

When he had been gone some time, the bride-elect suddenly exclaimed:

"I have forgotten all about my shoes! I want a

* *Mullah*=priest

pair of red velvet ones embroidered with pearls—nothing else would be appropriate.”

“Very good,” said the bridegroom; “then we will send Ujira for them.”

So Ujira was despatched; and Daulat retired, ostensibly to bathe. In reality, he took off his woman’s attire and washed his face, appearing once more as the young soldier.

Then, Munira and Ujira being at a safe distance, Daulat went out to the old dacoit.

“So,” he said, “my buffalo-cow is only worth six takhas, is she? How much is this worth—and this—and this?”—and he belaboured the old man until the latter could hardly stand and then hung him with ropes down the well.

After this, Daulat Singh caught his buffalo and loaded it with valuables; and, carrying another load himself, walked off to his village.

When the two younger dacoits returned in the evening with the mullah, they found the house dark and could discover no sign of their father nor of the strange woman, and they began to think that the two must have eloped, taking with them the missing valuables.

The mullah, however, asked for a drink of water before starting on his way back; and when Munira went to the well to draw some, the groans of his father attracted his attention; and he and the others soon drew him out of his uncomfortable position.

"Oh, sons," said the old man, between his moans, "that was no woman—it was the man from whom we bought the buffalo yesterday!" And with many lamentations over his bruises, he told them the story of his punishment.

Daulat Singh, in the meantime, had returned home, unloaded and stabled his buffalo, sent his wife to return the borrowed jewellery, and sat thinking how he could gain possession of the many valuables he had perforce left behind with the robbers.

The next day, when Munira and Ujira were attending to their father's hurts—which really did seem serious—the tinkle of a fakir's bell was heard at the door. When they opened it, they saw a yogi of the mendicant class standing outside. His hair was matted into rough, tawny plaits, and his head and half-nude body whitened with ashes, an orange loin-cloth was girt about him, and innumerable necklaces of large brown seeds hung about his chest. He bore in his hand a short staff crowned with little bells to announce his coming, and a coarse earthenware bowl to gather in the offerings of the piously-minded.

The dacoits knew that these fakirs are frequently excellent herbalists and skilled in the medicines of the jungle; and without delay they asked this one to go inside and examine their father.

The fakir shook his head, and pronounced the old man to be in a most dangerous condition.

"It is the truth that you have called me in just in

time," he said, "but perhaps with a little patience I may be able to relieve his pain."

He despatched Munira for many dainty and expensive food-stuffs, and when they were brought back, caused Ujira, under his direction, to prepare sundry delicate dishes with them.

The fakir ate the greater part of these himself, giving only a very small quantity to the invalid ; and when the meal was done he asked the old dacoit :

"Do you feel any better yet?"

The old man answered that he thought he did—a little ; and for a couple of days the fakir stayed on, keeping Munira and Ujira busy preparing nice little dinners of which he always ate the greater part. They could not complain, however, as their father really did seem to be better.

On the third day, the fakir said :

"It is now time to begin the use of medicines. You, Munira, take this list and hunt in the forest for the plants I have here described. With an ointment made from these herbs, your father's bruises will now entirely disappear."

A short time after Munira had gone, he remembered another ingredient which it would have been well to add.

"It would have eased your pain a great deal," he said, "but no matter—we will do without."

"Oh, no, no !" cried the old man. "There is Ujira doing nothing ; let him go, and do not leave out any-

thing which will make me quite well as soon as possible."

So Ujira went, too.

No sooner was he out of earshot, than the fakir washed away his disguising ashes and disclosed the features of Daulat Singh.

"Aha !" he cried to the terrified robber, "so my buffalo-cow is only worth six takhas, is she? How much is this worth—and this—and this?" And once more he beat his enemy, and left him bound with ropes in a corner under the bed, while he carried off another load of riches to his village.

When the sons came back in the evening with their bunches of rare herbs, they were again astonished to see no lights in the house; but the old man was soon found groaning in his corner, and full of accounts of the fakir's treachery.

"Ah! my sons!" he cried, "that was no fakir! It was the buffalo man come back," and they all fell to lamenting together over the bad luck which the ill-gotten buffalo had brought them.

In Daulat's village, it was not long before all the friends and relations of his wife had heard of the wonderful treasures he had brought back. Many of them saw the beautiful jewels and embroidered stuffs, and they began to grow envious of his good fortune.

At last several of the most covetous came to him, and said :

"We believe that these things were not well come

by; and unless you shew us where we can get similar riches, we shall report you to the authorities—and then see how much wealth you will have left!”

“I have not the least objection to showing you where these things come from,” answered Daulat Singh. “If you will be ready to accompany me to-morrow morning early, I will lead you there straight; and I can tell you there is plenty of treasure left.”

The next day his acquaintances came, carrying large empty sacks to hold their loot; and Daulat Singh led them into the jungle until they were not far from the dacoits’ little house.

“Now,” he said, “your plan is very simple. All you have to do is to go boldly up to that dwelling, and shout: “Is anyone within?” and if you get an answer inquiring whom you are, say: “It is that buffalo man whom you know!” The rest will follow.”

— The rest did follow!

No sooner did the robbers inside hear the answer, than they all three rushed out, furious with the desire for vengeance, and so blind with anger, that they attacked and drove away the astonished villagers, although the latter were in greater numbers, following them far into the jungles.

But Daulat Singh, safe hidden behind a tree while the fray was going on, waited his opportunity, and slipped into the house when the others were all at a distance.

He made a great bundle of all the things which he

had left on his former excursions, and then hurried off to his village.

When his companions returned, they went to him in a state of great indignation.

"You pretended to show us where to find treasure," they cried, "and we only gained a beating."

Daulat Singh exhibited his latest treasure-trove, and said :

"Why did you not use your opportunity ? Behold the riches I have to-day amassed."

Then the villagers said :

"You are indeed a wonderful man, and these things come of travel and cleverness. We who are but louts gain only blows where the wise gain wealth." And they went away and troubled Daulat Singh no more.

When the dacoits returned to their empty and rifled house, they came to the same conclusion with regard to Daulat Singh.

"We are cunning robbers," they said, "but he has cunningly robbed us." And they also thought it wisest to leave him alone for the future.

And so Daulat Singh and his wife grew fat and lived in peace.

CHAPTER VIII

UP TO THE MOUNTAINS

THE rains were over, and the time for Mr. Vansittart's leave drew near.

It was well to escape from the plains as soon as possible, for the sun's rays, no longer veiled by clouds and tempered by rain, were acting on the waterlogged soil, and finishing processes in the damp, rotting vegetation, which, however good for plants, were by no means good for humans.

There was a busy hum of preparation about the bungalow, and a strenuous packing, accompanied by much rushing about and shouting among the native servants.

The *durzi** was busy fashioning warm clothes, which seemed very much out of place at that moment, and made you feel prickly all over only to look at; but in the Hills they would be needed. He was a clever *durzi*, and could copy almost anything; also he used his toes to hold the end of his seams out straight and tight when he was sewing

* *Durzi*=tailor.

them, and he worked the seams away from him instead of towards him. Saidée got very puzzled between her mother's way of sewing and Nur Buksch's.

The first part of their journey was by rail—too hot and dusty to be very interesting to the little girl. Soon, however, things became less civilized and more picturesque.

The train gave place to a *dâk gharri*;* the hotel—pretentious, but really very inferior—to a *dâk bungalow*.†

The *dâk gharri* might have caused misgivings to anyone who knew not India. It had forgotten what it felt like to have a coat of paint or varnish, and the harness was tied up with rope in many places where rope did not enhance the smartness of the turn-out. The ponies were of every sort and condition—except that not one was handsome or amiable. *Dâk-gharri* work is not improving to a horse's temper. But, somehow, the decrepit vehicle got over the ground, and that at a very good pace when once started. There lay the difficulty. Starting was rather an alarming business, as the ponies at the changing stations generally began by refusing to budge a step. Under the gentle persuasion of the whole establishment pushing behind, they would suddenly rush with a wild dash to one side of the

* *Dâk gharri* = a post-carriage.

† *Dâk bungalow* = rest-house.

road, then with an unexpected swerve to the other, threatening at each turn to upset the whole thing. The occupants mostly shut their eyes and held on tight.

To put it mildly, the roads went from bad to worse as they journeyed on, as most of them had not been mended since the rains—and only those who have lived in India know what that means.

Once or twice, where torrents had covered the path with boulder-stones, the whole party got out and walked, and it was a rather tired little girl who arrived at the dâk bungalow, or rest-house, where they were to spend the night before starting for the climb into the mountains now towering close before them.

The presiding genius of the rest-house was an old Mohammedan cook, who fascinated Saidée from the moment she first saw him. He had bleached his beard red, which added to his holiness, Ayah said (how, Saidée tried in vain to imagine). He was very humble, but very business-like and quick; and when he talked, he wagged his head solemnly—particularly the red beard—and rubbed his hands together just in front of his chest. His back had a permanent crook, apparently brought about by his deferential manners. As the Vansittarts had sent their table-servants on ahead, the old khansamah waited at table, and served the dinner he had just cooked—doing both really quite well; and he put

on for the occasion a long tussore silk coat, in which he looked quite distinguished. There was a certain sameness about the *ménu*: "Chicken soup—côtelettes de volaille—roast fowl—custard pudding." The poultry-yard was very fundamental; but, after all, they were in a holiday mood and out to enjoy themselves; and, as Mrs. Vansittart said, "It was all nice and clean."

I should mention that next morning the *khan-samah* gave them boiled eggs for *chota hazri*,* and packets of egg-and-chicken sandwiches to take away with them.

Saidée will never forget that wonderful march up, up into the mountains. Mr. and Mrs. Vansittart rode on firm-footed little hill-ponies; but Saidée and the Ayah were carried by hillmen in "dandies," a sort of open sedan-chair. Sometimes they walked, for a rest to themselves and the carriers; and ever the air grew clearer, purer, cooler, as they reached higher altitudes and the foot-hills folded them in.

There were multitudes of butterflies of lovely shapes and colours sunning themselves on the hill-sides; Saidée liked best the peacock-green swallow-tails flashing all over with jewels.

Ayah gathered her some flowers of the "sad tree"—waxen, pretty things much like jessamine blossoms, only their white petals have a sideways, whirling twist, and the tubes are bright orange.

* *Chota hazri* = literally, little breakfast.

They passed hill villages of picturesque double-storied houses, oddly like very dilapidated Swiss chalets. Near these were groups of sheds, in which lived the serfs. Some of the women were rather Italian in dress, with a knotted kerchief about the head, and skirt and bodice of brilliant colours. In the distance they heard one singing in a field—such a quaint, pretty song, with little turns and “jodels” in it.

Many of the little terraced fields cut in the hillside were a blaze of crimson, for the hillmen cultivate “love-lies-bleeding” as a food-grain. The trees were the haystacks. High above the ground, in the strong forked branches, the fodder was stacked, so that in snowy weather the people could always get it.

They met many Gujias, with their buffaloes, coming down from the upper pastures, where they had been spending the warm weather. They are a nomad gipsy race dependent upon their buffaloes, with which they wander about as the Laps do with their reindeer. Magnificent men and women, they are; for the most part very tall, with clear-cut, large-featured, noble-looking faces of the type of the North-American Indians. The women wear multitudes of silver ornaments, and love crimson and blue to dress in; and they carry enormous loads on their heads, balanced with the help of a statuesque arm.

Suddenly the cavalcade turned a corner of the road, and the Vansittarts stopped with a breathless gasp. They had had no warning, and their first view of The Snows burst upon them unexpectedly, so clear, so distinct, that the great white peaks seemed almost to float above them. They seemed so near, in that pure atmosphere, their very breath made one shiver ; and yet it would have taken days of marching to reach them.

While they were making final preparations for the journey into the interior, they stayed for a few days at a pretty house lent them by a friend who was then in camp—a very cosy house, most unlike their own Plains bungalow with its large high rooms. The garden was full of dear English flowers—chrysanthemums and roses—set against that background of the frozen ocean of the Himalaya.

Saidée's little bedroom was quite small, and the walls were all of deodar, plainly varnished. The deodar is very nearly (but not quite) the cedar of Lebanon ; and the scent in the room was delicious. On the floor lay a big black rug, made from the skin of a Himalayan bear. A very fine bear he must have been when he was alive and roamed the mountains, eating wild raspberries and other nice things. The window had a thick wadded blind to keep out the cold ; and, strangest of all to the little girl, there was a bright fire burning in her bedroom. She had travelled into a new country in that day's

journeying, and already in a few hours the pinched "hot weather" look was leaving the child.

She curled herself up on the thick fur and stretched out her hands to the flame. It was almost an instinct to demand a story there before the fire; and Ayah, wrapped in the red woollen shawl that had been Saidée's present, was only too pleased to crouch down beside her and comply.

CHAPTER IX

THE POISONED THORNS

THERE was once a Raja who was very proud of his kingdom, his wealth, and his power. All who came near him had to be very humble indeed, and any breach of what the Raja considered proper respect was generally punished by instant death. When he gave public audiences, there always stood at his left hand an archer with a drawn bow, ready to shoot anyone who dared lift his eyes from the pavement or raise his bent head.

The Raja had seven daughters, and these had also been brought up to regard their father with deep subservience. Each morning, when they went to wish the Raja health and a prosperous day, they had to perform the following ceremony :

The seven girls prostrated themselves before their royal father, and the Raja asked :

“ By whose grace have you life, food, and being ?” and they all had to answer :

“ By your grace, O Mighty One !”

Now, the youngest daughter was cleverer than the

others, and began to think for herself, so that one day, when the usual question was asked, she stood up and said :

“The same hand which gives you power, father, gives us life and well-being. It is to God alone we owe these things.”

The Raja was furious ; but, because she was his daughter, he would not have her killed, but sent her in a dhooli into the jungle, with orders to the bearers to put her down wherever they chose and leave her.

When they were in the depths of the forest the Princess said :

“This place will do as well as any other. You can leave me here and go back,” and they obeyed her.

She wandered on until she reached the bank of a river, so wide that she could hardly see to the other side, and then she sat down upon a high rock and wondered what she had better do.

Before long a heavily-laden ship appeared, carrying merchandise. When it came opposite to the spot where the Princess sat, the ship stuck fast and could not be moved in either direction, in spite of all the efforts of the sailors.

They were very much frightened ; but as they had on board a wonderful oracle they consulted it, and found that it was the attraction of the girl on shore which had stopped their progress, and that

the spell could be broken by her hitting the ship with a stone.

They called out to her, and entreated her to do so ; and as she rose and complied with their request, the merchants noticed her magnificent dress and great beauty.

"It must be some Princess," they said ; "but by what strange chance has she come here alone ?" And they asked if they could help her in any way.

"I should like to go to the other side of the river," she said ; "you can ferry me across if you will ?"

The merchants were very pleased to do so ; and, as they landed her on the opposite side, one of them presented her with a young slave girl to cook for and attend on her, and to carry the big bundle of food which they gave her.

"It is not well that you should go alone," they said, "for we can see you are of the highest rank."

She thanked them and passed on, followed by the serving-maid, and they two journeyed together for many days, until, torn and weary and soiled with dust, they reached a large and deserted enclosure, containing a palace and garden.

The gates were wide open, and the paths overgrown with weeds. In the centre of the garden was a watercourse falling from terrace to terrace, with occasional tanks and the remains of fountains, but the way was dry and the fountains played no more. Bulbuls fluttered in and out of the pleasure-houses

which dotted the garden here and there, and lizards sunned themselves upon the carved white marble pillars of the verandas. Snakes glided across the path, and disappeared beneath the pink roses and orange marigolds, which ran riot among what had once been neat flower-beds; and the whole place spoke of past beauty fallen to decay.

At the end of the garden was a superb and many-roomed palace, full of all that the eye could desire, but covered with the dust of years. Gilded ceilings had tarnished, and silk hangings faded, and carpet and cushion and table were colourless with the all-pervading dust. In some rooms there were rich clothes and jewels, but all were in the same condition—as if life had been suddenly stayed in the midst of luxury and splendour.

The Princess wandered through the rooms fearlessly, followed by the slave-girl; and in the innermost room of all they found a bedstead covered with a quilt of gold-embroidered satin. Upon it lay the body of a young Raja, motionless and apparently lifeless. His skin was stuck full of little poisoned thorns, so thickly that not a hair's-breadth was without one.

The Princess set to work at once to pull these out, and toiled unceasingly for many weeks, while her attendant brought her food and water; nor did she even stay to change her way-worn dress, although the slave-girl soon found something more

pleasing to herself among the treasures of the palace.

At last all the poisoned thorns were out except one, and that was in the Raja's eye.

Then the Princess rested from her labours, and called her servant.

"Do you watch by the Raja," she said, "while I bathe and find some fitting garments to exchange for these soiled and torn ones; for it would not be well for him to awake and see me thus."

She had hardly left the room, however, before the slave-girl approached the bed and pulled the one remaining thorn out of the Raja's eye.

He sat up and looked about him; and, seeing the girl beside him, asked her who she was.

"I am a great Raja's daughter," answered the slave, "and I have travelled many miles between my father's kingdom and yours; and many weeks have I spent pulling the poisoned thorns out of your body so that you might live again."

The Raja was thanking her, when the real princess, still wearing her old garments, hastily returned, for she had heard the sound of voices and feared some treachery.

As she entered, the Raja asked who she, also, was; and the other answered:

"This is my servant and slave, whom I brought with me to cook my food and fetch me water."

The real Princess knew that there was little hope

of convincing him of the true state of affairs as she stood in her rags beside the other ; and so she remained silent and determined to await some better opportunity for declaring her identity.

Soon after the Raja's release from the vile sorcery of the poisoned thorns, the palace was once more a scene of liveliness and splendour. Myriads of servants appeared ; and indoors and outdoors the place soon lost all sign of its deep and dusty slumbers.

The Raja declared his intention of marrying the slave-girl, whom he believed to be of high lineage and his own rescuer ; and he ordered preparations of much magnificence to be made for their marriage. She was in the meantime provided with a beautiful little mansion, with servants, horses, and equipages, and money, jewels, and rich clothing to her full content.

The real Princess was given a small room among the outhouses and required to do various menial tasks ; but she was not treated with any unkindness.

The new servants of the Rani-elect went to her and asked what she would be pleased to order for her dinner ; but the slave-girl, knowing no better, answered that a little rice and peas, nicely boiled, would do for her.

When, however, they asked her attendant, she ordered *pilau* and a delicate *ragout*, besides various expensive and delicious sweetmeats.

The servants were astonished, but no one told the

Raja ; and matters went on like this for some days, the Rani ordering food used by the poor, and her attendant requiring the diet of the wealthy.

Now, it happened that a servant of the Raja's was going on a journey to the kingdom of the Princess's father. When she heard it, she went to him with a request—namely, that he would deliver a letter for her at the King's palace, and bring back whatever was given to him.

Then she wrote to one of her sisters ; and, after having told her that she was alive and well, requested her to send a certain box of puppets which she greatly prized.

These were not ordinary dolls ; they were magic ones, and every night at twelve o'clock they could do the bidding of her to whom they belonged.

When the Princess got them, she was therefore delighted ; and as soon as twelve o'clock arrived, she opened her box and ordered the magic puppets to give her a beautiful dress, to sweep and garnish her poor chamber, and to spread a dainty supper of the dishes she liked best. Then, when she had finished eating, they brought rose-water for her hands.

Afterwards, lying on a cushioned divan the dolls had provided, she watched while they danced and sang for her pleasure until she was tired.

Before she went to bed, she took off her rich clothes, and put the puppets back in their box, and in the morning she appeared again as the poor servant.

This happened every evening, until one night the *chowkidar*, or watchman, noticing a light in her window as he went by on his rounds, peeped in and saw the well-spread table and the dancing puppets. They were singing a song in praise of her father's power and magnificence.

The watchman sought an interview with the Raja next day, and told him all he had seen ; and the Raja—who had not found the manners of his bride-elect all he had hoped for and began to suspect that all was not quite right—decided to try and solve the mystery by watching secretly with the *chowkidar*.

When the latter, however, came to call him, the Raja was so sound asleep that he could not be roused, and the Princess's supper and evening entertainment passed unheeded.

The same thing happened the second day ; and now the eve of the wedding-day had come.

The Raja determined that nothing should interfere this time, so he cut his finger deeply and rubbed salt into the wound. The pain this caused him was sufficient to prevent his sleeping, and when the *chowkidar* arrived he was quite awake and ready to accompany him.

They went together to the servants' quarters and placed themselves outside the Princess's window.

At the usual time she opened her box of puppets, and when she came forth arrayed in the beautiful dress and jewels they gave her, she looked a Princess

indeed. Then the usual costly supper was served, and the puppets began their evening *nautch* * and song.

The Raja could keep back no longer, but suddenly entered in the midst of them.

"Tell me who you are, and what this all means," he said. "From whence came these jewels, finer than any I possess, and of what great King do these magic puppets sing?"

"They sing of my father," answered the Princess, "for it is I who travelled far and freed you from the poisoned thorns, restoring you to life again. My slave-girl, while alone for a minute in the room with you, pulled the last thorn out of your eye and pretended that she was the one who had done all."

The Raja made her tell him her whole story. He was very angry with the false Princess and sent her away to work hard among the lowest of his slaves.

As the preparations for his wedding were already complete, he married the real Princess at once. So she became Rani over a very great kingdom.

* *Nautch* = dance.

CHAPTER X

GOOD-BYE

THUS we leave them—brown skin and white, sleek black hair and curly gold, set against their background of eternal snow.

Much there was about them that was full of youth and yet age-old, as we little human folk account things ancient—the everlasting sympathy of motherhood, for, in spite of strange blood, diverse rank, and alien race, it was that which bound simple, primitive Umma to her charge, Saidée; the Himalaya, Home of Snow, unutterably old, and yet, geologists tell us, youthful beside other hoary mountain ranges; even the old Eastern tales I have tried so feebly to transcribe with my Western pen—these have linked age and youth together for years uncounted, as generation after generation has passed them on in the same way, in which they were told by the Ayah.

NATIVE AND OTHER TERMS USED

Babu, clerk.

Bachchi, little girl (feminine of "little young thing").

Baer-tree, a thorny shrub with round red, orange, and green berries the size of cherries; much enjoyed by the wild animals.

Bania, merchant.

Bearer, valet.

Beliat, England.

Burra bursāt, big rains = the monsoon.

Burhya, old woman.

Chapati, thin, flat, unleavened cakes made of wholemeal.

Charpoy, native bedstead made of wood and string.

Chic, blind made of split bamboo; generally painted green, with a red and yellow pattern in the middle.

Chirya, chirya, pani lao, "Birdie, birdie, bring me some water."

Chota hazri, little (or early) breakfast, as distinguished from eleven o'clock "déjeuner à la fourchette"—*burra hazri*.

Daftar, office.

Dāk bungalow, post-house or rest-house.

Dāk gharri, post-carriage.

Dawai, medicine.

Dhobi, washerman.

Dhooli, covered litter used by native women of the upper-classes when travelling.

Durzi, tailor.

Fakir, a holy man, or religious mendicant—not always holy by any means.

94 NATIVE AND OTHER TERMS USED

Gáon, village.

Hamari behti, my child (feminine).

Hookah, native pipe or hubble-bubble. It often has a very long flexible stem, and always smells horribly.

John Company, native name for the East India Company.

Kencho, Je, "Pull, there!"

Khansamah, cook.

Khitmatgar, table-servant.

Morah, a little round wicker stool.

Mullah, a priest.

Munshi, interpreter.

Nautch, dance.

Purdah nashin, with a veiled face, as an upper-class Indian woman generally is in public.

Raj, government.

Sarai, native rest-house.

Sepoy, soldier.

Tahpa, a wicker dome over which clothes are aired.

Takha, small piece of native money.

CLIFTON :
J. BAKER AND SON,
PRINTERS.

